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August 21, 1998

Central Nevada Communication Sites Modified Final Plan Amendment

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The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for the stewardship of our public lands. It is committed to manage, protect, and improve these lands in a manner to serve the needs of the American people for all times. Management is based upon the principles of multiple use and sustained yield of our nation's resources within a framework of environmental responsibility and scientific technology. These resources include recreation, rangelands, timber, minerals, watershed, fish and wildlife, wilderness, air and scenic, scientific and cultural values.

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United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT
Nevada State Office
P.O. Box 12000
Reno, Nevada 89520-0006

IN REPLY REFER TO:
1610 (NV-030)

August 21, 1998

Dear Reader:

In June 1996, we issued the Central Nevada Communication Sites Final Plan Amendment. A protest was filed by the Navy soon after. In July 1997, a partial resolution to the protest was reached, all decisions except those restricting threat emitter locations were upheld. On June 26, 1998, the decision restricting threat emitter locations was formally withdrawn and other management prescriptions have been adjusted to reflect that decision.

The modified final plan amendment is a combination of the original *Proposed Amendment* and the *Continuation of Current Management Alternative* analyzed in the Central Nevada Communication Sites Proposed Plan Amendment and Environmental Assessment. The decisions now reflect Bureauwide consistency regarding the process for addressing military electronic warfare sites on public lands.

On August 14, 1998, I requested that the Navy submit an Electronic Warfare Range Plan to the BLM that addresses the comprehensive management of all Navy facilities on public lands in central Nevada. That plan will reflect the Navy's short- and long-term operational needs, including threat emitter site right-of-way applications that the Navy sees as most urgent. The plan will then be reviewed by an independent consultant to see if there are areas we have collectively overlooked or additional alternatives for meeting the Navy's training needs that should be considered.

The plan will then go through a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis by a third party contractor. BLM will be the lead agency for this process. This will include the opportunity for extensive public participation, beginning with scoping meetings that will allow the Navy to describe their training needs, and the public to raise their issues and concerns about the Navy's proposals.

Implementation of this modified final plan amendment may begin 30 days after the date of approval. Your comments on the changes to the final plan amendment may be made to the Carson City Field Office by October 1, 1998. These comments and any questions should be referred to Terri Knutson, BLM, Carson City Field Office, 5665 Morgan Mill Road, Carson City, NV 89701, at 702-885-6000. Questions may also be referred to Wayne King, Battle Mountain Field Office, 50 Bastian Road, Battle Mountain, NV 89820, at 702-635-4000.

My thanks to those of you who gave us your comments and suggestions. I hope that you will continue to participate in the process I have described, and that together we can arrive at a positive outcome that provides the Navy with needed training opportunities, without causing unreasonable impacts to the residents and natural resources of central Nevada.

Sincerely,

Robert V. Abbey
State Director, Nevada

Central Nevada Communication Sites Modified Final Plan Amendment

PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of this amendment to the Shoshone-Eureka, Lahontan and Walker Resource Management Plans (RMPs) is to identify preferred locations for future communication sites in central Nevada. The amendment identifies areas where sites will and will not be permitted, identifies the types of sites that are appropriate for location on public lands and identifies measures needed to protect public health and safety as related to their use.

The amendment is needed to protect the long term quality of the human environment, including public land ecosystems and the public's health, safety, use and enjoyment of public lands from direct, indirect and cumulative impacts associated with development and operation of communication sites. The amendment is also needed to facilitate site processing by identifying preferred locations. The amendment was initiated at the request of residents of central Nevada and the State of Nevada. State and public concern resulted from changed circumstances involving the expansion of electronic warfare and communication sites for air combat warfare training in central Nevada by the Fallon Naval Air Station. The amendment is intended to address the management of public land ecosystems and their relation to the quality of life in central Nevada.

Most of this expansion has occurred in the area managed under the Lahontan RMP. An evaluation of the RMP concluded that management direction for military activities was needed. This amendment also includes portions of the Shoshone-Eureka and Walker RMP areas with similar needs.

An evaluation of the cumulative amount of sites found that 69 Navy electronic warfare and communication sites have been constructed on public lands. More than 200 miles of associated powerlines, roads and fiber-optic cable rights-of-way have also been authorized. Sites of primary concern are threat emitters. These sites simulate enemy surface to air threats. They emit electromagnetic radiation and are directly associated with military combat aircraft training flight locations. Many sites are manned and security patrolled.

The expansion of these sites and associated military air combat training exercises in central Nevada may affect the quality of the human environment, including the quality of life of BLM's neighbors in central Nevada and the public's use and enjoyment of public lands.

LOCATION

The planning area includes 5.2 million acres of public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management in the central Nevada counties of Churchill, Lander, Eureka, Nye and Mineral (map, page 4).

FINAL PLAN AMENDMENT DECISION

A proposed amendment, two action alternatives and a continuation of present management alternative were analyzed in an environmental assessment. Based on that analysis, subsequent public input, consultation with the Navy and other communication site users, the proposed amendment was selected in the decision for the Final Plan Amendment that was approved by the BLM Nevada State Director on June 24, 1996.

On August 1, 1996, the Navy filed a protest of the final plan amendment. A resolution to the protest was reached and on June 26, 1998, the BLM Nevada State Director withdrew the portion of the decision prohibiting threat emitter locations outside of the Dixie Valley area.

The modified decision is the combined *Proposed Amendment* and *Continuation of Current Management Alternative* with preferred communication site locations and additional management prescriptions.

The modified amendment includes the following management prescriptions:

1. Applications for rights-of-way for communications sites, including all military electronic warfare sites, will be considered in the area identified as permitted on the map (page 4). Any such applications for electronic warfare sites will be analyzed through the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process, within the context of a comprehensive Electronic Warfare Range Plan to be prepared and updated as needed by the Navy. The plan will address the comprehensive management of all Navy facilities on public lands in central Nevada, with provisions for establishing possible thresholds on reasonable numbers of sites on public lands (as determined through the NEPA process), annual assessment of the continuing need for individual sites, including alternative configurations to reduce numbers of sites without sacrificing training quality, and eventual clean-up, rehabilitation and relinquishment of sites no longer required to meet the Navy's mission.

2. Facilitate communication site processing and minimize surface disturbance by grouping future communication facilities at locations where existing facilities occur, access is reasonably available, terrain is appropriate for communication facility needs, and other resource values are limited. These preferred locations are Fairview Peak, New Pass, Mt. Moses, the north end of the Fish Creek Mts. and Mt. Lewis (map, page 4). Communication site applicants will be encouraged to locate in these areas. These areas will be available for all civilian and military sites.

3. With proper justification, continue to provide for the location of future civilian and military communication sites (including telemetry sites and threat emitters) on more than four million acres of central Nevada. Proper justification includes physical and economic factors.

4. Encourage additional Navy electronic warfare site development in the

currently heavily used Dixie/Fairview Valleys Bell Flat/Middlegate area.

5. Protect important natural, recreation, wilderness, wildlife, watershed, visual and Native American values by prohibiting future communication and electronic warfare sites of all types in the most sensitive areas. These include portions of the Clan Alpine, Desatoya, Stillwater, Gabbs Valley and Simpson Park Mountain ranges, Bald Mountain and the Sand Mountain and Hickison Petroglyph recreation areas (map, page 4).

6. Ensure that public health and safety on public lands are protected by including the following stipulation on all new and existing communication and electronic warfare sites: "No harmful levels of electromagnetic radiation from communication facilities will be permitted on open public lands."

7. Other than the electromagnetic radiation stipulation above, existing communication and electronic warfare sites will not be affected by this amendment.

8. Management decisions apply to all communication and electronic warfare sites and associated facilities, regardless of the type of authorization. This includes rights-of-way, withdrawals and cooperative agreements.

9. Monitoring and Evaluation. Communication and electronic warfare site development under the plan amendment will be periodically monitored and evaluated to determine the effectiveness of the decisions. The objective is to determine whether or not implementation of communication site management is achieving the desired results. Information obtained through the evaluation process will be used to adjust management, including any subsequent amendments if appropriate. Monitoring and evaluation will be consistent with the schedules identified in the appropriate RMP.

10. In response to concerns raised as a result of this plan amendment process, the Navy has agreed to drop radar avoidance chaff only over lands under the jurisdiction of the Navy.

11. Current standard operating procedures for environmental analysis will be followed. Each proposal for an individual communication site or threat emitter will be further analyzed in a project-specific environmental analysis.

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Central Nevada Communication Sites

Modified Final Plan Amendment

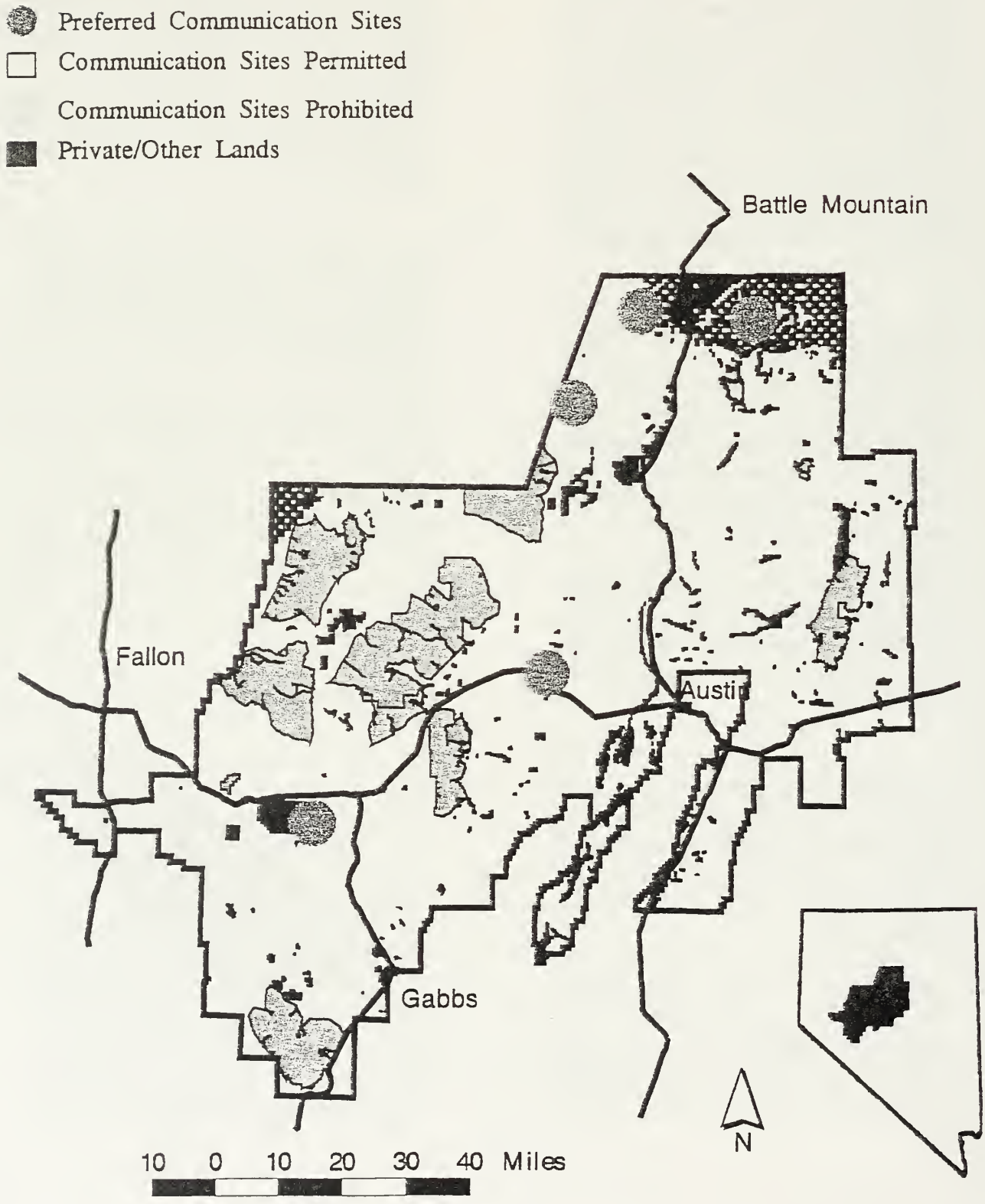


Table 1 Land Management Prescriptions		
Preferred communications site locations (acres(#sites))	Lands closed to all communications sites (acres)	Lands potentially available for all types of communications sites (acres)
4,000 (5)	640,000	4,572,000

RATIONALE FOR MODIFIED DECISION

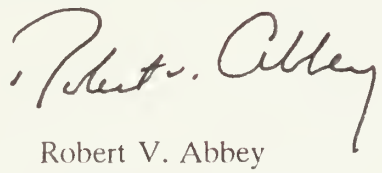
This modified final plan amendment reflects an approach to considering military electronic warfare rights-of-way applications that is consistent throughout BLM. New communications sites will be considered on a case-by-case basis, taking into account the preferred, permitted and prohibited areas identified in the map on page 4. New military electronic warfare sites will be considered within the context of the comprehensive plan to be submitted by the Navy.

The Navy's comprehensive Electronic Warfare Range Plan will be reviewed and alternatives will be considered. The plan will be addressed through the NEPA process, including full public involvement. The unique characteristics of each proposed site will be examined within the context of the comprehensive plan and will also be subject to NEPA review. For these reasons, it was felt that management prescription 1 from the *Central Nevada Communications Sites Final Plan Amendment* should be withdrawn, and the impacts of future electronic warfare expansion examined in a separate process.

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT AND RATIONALE

Impacts from the comprehensive Electronic Warfare Range Plan to be prepared by the Navy, and any new electronic warfare sites, will be considered in a separate NEPA document. The identification of preferred areas for communications sites will result in minimizing the proliferation of sites throughout the area. Prohibiting communication sites in the most sensitive areas will prevent future adverse surface disturbance and associated air combat training impacts. Prohibiting harmful levels of radiation from communication sites will eliminate public health risks associated with the sites. Consequently, the plan amendment will have no significant impact.

APPROVED:



Robert V. Abbey
State Director, Nevada

DATE: 8-21-98

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